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(with box)

If we ALL don’t act, the haters win

Shammai Engelmayer

More Jews live in the Greater New York Metropolitan Area—which includes Northern New Jersey—than anywhere other than the Greater Tel Aviv area. If there is anyone who is still not convinced that Jew-hatred is reaching epidemic proportions in the United States, consider some of what happened in Greater New York in the last full week of 2019:

• On December 23, two boys, ages 6 and 7, were physically assaulted in Brooklyn, and a 65-year-old man was viciously attacked in upper Manhattan.

• Three violent incidents were committed on December 24, all in Crown Heights at different times of the day.

• On December 25, two Brooklyn men were assaulted in separate incidents. In Teaneck, a man assaulted two people in Sammy’s Bagels, and then assaulted a third person about a block away on Palisade Avenue.

• A Jewish woman, her 3-year-old child in tow, was hit on the head in Brooklyn on December 26 by a woman who shouted, “You [expletive] Jew. Your end is coming to you.”

• On Friday, Dec. 27, three Jewish women were assaulted outside Chabad World Headquarters in Brooklyn, and a “shooting threat,” in the NYPD’s words, was made inside the building. (The outside attacker, a woman, was arraigned on Saturday, then rearrested the next day for assaulting another Brooklyn woman.)

• After Shabbat on Dec. 28, a man pushed his way into a chasidic rabbi’s home in Monsey and began slashing out with a machete, wounding six people.

These events capped a month of anti-Jewish acts in our area that saw three people gunned down in the JC Kosher Supermarket in Jersey City (often referred to as a bodega in news reports), in a shooting spree that also took the life of a decorated police officer visiting a nearby cemetery.

These acts are only part of the story, however. According to FBI statistics released in November, 2018 actually saw an 8 percent drop in religion-based hate crimes—except for crimes against Jews. Of the 1,550 recorded religion-based offenses, 57.8 percent, or nearly 900, were anti-Jewish. While statistics for 2019 will not be released until next November, the FBI statisticians say that, anecdotally, the year just ended will be even worse. Similar sentiments are heard from the NYPD.

The FBI’s statistics, however, are flawed, for reasons to be explained below.

Fueling Jew-hatred in the United States are politicians on the right and left who by their comments and actions embolden the haters.

And, yes, it unequivocally starts with President Trump. For all his words of “support” for Jews, his overall well-documented use of alt-right White Supremacist codewords and many of his actions (or lack thereof) send a message to the haters that we are fair game. For example, under President Obama, the budget to battle extremism was over $21 million and there was a 17-person staff. Even as the number of hate crimes began to soar in 2016, Trump almost immediately on becoming president slashed the budget to a mere $3 million and cut the staff by half.

Trump’s “Chanukah present” to us—the controversial executive order he signed to curb anti-Semitism on college campuses—is another case in point. Trump signed it at the White House Chanukah party. He then invited a “tremendous faith leader,” Texas Pastor Robert Jeffress, whom he identified as a strong supporter of his, to say a few words. Words Jeffress usually offers are hateful towards all other religions, but Judaism in particular. “Judaism―you can’t be saved being a Jew,” he once said on a radio program. At another time, he said, “You know, Jesus was very clear. Hell is not only going to be populated by murderers and drug dealers and child abusers. Hell is going to be filled with good religious people who have rejected the truth of Christ.”

Just a few days before this bizarre twist to an otherwise festive event, Trump addressed the Israeli American Council in Hollywood, Florida. He began by invoking his backhanded August 2019 suggestion that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the United States—Jews who voted for Democrats, he said then, were disloyal to Israel. This time, he said there were Jews in his audience who “don’t love Israel enough.” He then yet again invoked his favorite “Jews and money” stereotype, and in a somewhat nasty way. “A lot of you are in the real estate business, because I know you very well,” he said. “You’re brutal killers, not nice people at all. But you have to vote for me—you have no choice….Some of you don’t like me. Some of you I don’t like at all, actually. And you’re going to be my biggest supporters because you’re going to be out of business in about 15 minutes” if a Democrat defeats him in November.

As Joshua Shanes, associate professor of Jewish studies at the College of Charleston, noted last month in a Washington Post op-ed, modern anti-Semites “ascribe a number of immutable negative traits to Jews,” but two in particular: “that Jews are ruthless misers who care more about their ill-gotten wealth than the interests of their countries or even their own values…, [and] that Jews’ loyalty to their countries is suspect since they constitute a foreign element.”

Trump fits that bill, but while he is the enabler in chief, he has a lot of company these days on both sides of the aisle and at every level of government.

Following the Jersey City shooting, for example, Joan Terrell-Paige, a member of the city’s Board of Education, seemed to side with the two killers in a Facebook post: “[The two shooters] went directly to the kosher supermarket….What is the message they were sending? Are we brave enough to explore the answer to their message? Are we brave enough to stop the assault on the Black communities of America” by Jews whom she described as “brutes” waving “bags of money” at black homeowners? Calls for her resignation sparked a candlelight vigil in support of her comments on January 2.

Then there is Michael Jackson, a member of the Paterson City Council, who on September 11 publicly accused a developer of trying to “Jew us down.” Six days earlier, Trenton City Council President Kathy McBride made the same comment, albeit in a closed meeting, the details of which were soon leaked.

All manner of anti-Jewish tropes are flying off the lips of “leaders” across the country. They fuel the hate, and the haters—especially on the right—see it as license to act.

There is much we can do—must do. Local events such as those held in our area this week are helpful, but a much louder “voice” is needed if government is to hear us. As I advocated in two columns in 2019, we must push our national organizations to join together to convene a massive rally—either on the National Lawn or, better still, in Charlottesville, Virginia—against hate in general and Jew-hatred in particular. From sea to shining sea, those who are able to do so should attend that rally by the busloads, trainloads and planeloads, and encourage others to do so. One purpose of that rally would be to demand that President Trump reverse his decision to neutralize federal government efforts to combat hate in this country. It is not possible to combat hate without the tools needed to do so.

We also need to insist that the FBI’s reporting methods be improved, because the bureau is seriously underreporting these crimes. The FBI identified fewer than 895 hate crimes against Jews and Jewish institutions in 2018, while the ADL recorded a total of 1,879 such attacks.

Two hate crimes—the murder of a Lebanese-American, Khalid Jabara, on the doorstep of his Tulsa, Oklahoma, home on August 12, 2016, and the murder on that same date exactly one year later of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville—never made it into the FBI’s statistics, even though the killers in both cases were prosecuted for hate crimes. To improve hate crime reporting, the Khalid Jabara and Heather Heyer National Opposition to Hate, Assault, and Threats to Equality (NO HATE) Act was introduced in both the House and Senate, but appears to be going nowhere in either chamber.

H.R.3545 was introduced by Rep. Donald S. Beyer, Jr., D-Va., with four Republican and three Democratic co-sponsors. S 2043 was introduced by Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., and has 15 co-sponsors—all Democrats (including Kirsten Gillebrand, but not Chuck Schumer, Corey Booker or Robert Menendez). The House bill, among other things, would “provide incentives for hate crime reporting, provide grants for State-run hate crime hotlines, and establish additional penalties for individuals convicted under” federal hate crime statutes. The Senate bill is almost identical, although it uses the term “alternative penalties” in its introduction.

We need to support the NO HATE Act at the national rally I propose, and we need to do so by sending letters, or making phone calls, or sending e-mails to our elected leaders. See the box accompanying this article for how and to whom.

Please take a few minutes to do so right now (or after Shabbat, if that is when you are reading this). Simply say, “I (we) support (H.R. 3545) (S 2943), the NO HATE Act, and I (we) urge you to do the same. We cannot stamp out hate if we do not have truly accurate data and truly appropriate penalties.”